



## 5 Ways to Increase Reach and Interaction Using Social Media

By Heather Fletcher, senior editor, *Target Marketing*  
Mar 18, 2009

Blockbuster days are ahead for direct marketers who find a niche in social media marketing; perhaps especially for those at the namesake movie rental outfit that is capitalizing on helping Facebook poker players who go bust.

Ian Swanson, CEO and co-founder of Los Angeles analytics and social media marketing firm Sometrics, is among those providing tips on how to increase conversion rates in social media marketing. In his example, the broke poker player will convert in an advertiser-supported transaction.

"I'm playing poker on Facebook," he says. "I run out of poker chips, and I want to earn more poker chips to keep playing. At that point, I'm presented with a screen that has lead gen offers, such as GameFly, Netflix, Blockbuster, Discover Card. And if I sign up for one of those brands, one of those products, I effectively will earn my chips to keep playing the Facebook game."

Swanson and others say the social media marketing naysayers who aren't seeing the conversion rates he is—of 1 percent to 2 percent per 1,000 impressions—still may be trying to push brand awareness, a nebulous concept in what he characterizes as more of a cost-per-acquisition space.

"I really don't feel like going the traditional route works in the social space. It's not effective," seconds Chad Israel, social marketing director for Columbus, Ohio-based marketing agency Engauge. "You see, essentially, the same clickthrough rates and conversion rates that you do for traditional banner ads."

So here's what they say works to ramp up reach, interaction and conversions:

**1. Getting the Word Out.** Erin Robbins, in marketing at Mountain View, Calif.-based Web-sharing tool company ShareThis, says widgets or browser plug-ins such as those her firm offers can aid in spreading the news. Among the 82,000 to 85,000 publishers (such as ABC.com) who use the tool, which can be customized, there's been a fivefold increase in sharing, she says. That's helped, Robbins says, by the fact that ShareThis stores what users send and allows them to search it and send it again via many channels, including e-mail, instant message and text message.

Robbins says that while e-mail remains the primary way people share information, Facebook and Twitter are close runners-up. (ShareThis allows users to send posts to their Facebook and Twitter accounts.)

**2. Invest in Advergaming.** New York-based game software company Arkadium points to comScore research from January that shows how online gaming sites grew 27 percent last year to 86 million visitors in December 2008 and that people spent 42 percent more time playing.

Neal Sinno, Arkadium's vice president of business development, says marketers designing an advergame should follow a few guidelines. They should target the game to the appropriate audience, such as an action-oriented game to teenage boys; define their goals, like if they're selling one product, a single game should suffice, while a continued strategy may include several games; and they should consider the timing and budget, with fast turnarounds possibly requiring a rebranded game.

Engauge, for instance, created an advergame for coffee-shot company STOK of Broomfield, Colo. The maker of the caffeinated drink additive will host the game on its site, which then can be embedded on other sites. STOK hopes its target audience of Generation Y and millennials embed the widget on Facebook, MySpace and professional networking site LinkedIn. After all, it's aimed at them, says Israel: "There's challenges on each level—STOK power boosts, bad guys to stay away from—and the goal is to stay awake as long as possible."

**3. Sponsor Applications or Pages Within Social Networking Sites.** On Facebook, DreamWorks is promoting a comedy that opens on Friday. As of Monday, though, "I Love You, Man" already had more than 5,000 fans, perhaps lured by the embedded videos, sweepstakes and opportunities to comment.

LinkedIn provides ad-supported applications that can enhance members' profiles, such as the Google Presentations tool that lets professionals upload PowerPoint work or use Google's online application to embed presentations on profiles, Israel notes.

**4. Consider Advertiser-Supported Transactions.** "How we drive these conversions is by tying the ads to action, tying it to the communication, tying it to the game play," Swanson says. "And if you're able to interweave the ads within the social action, then we're noticing that the clicks are much higher." He points to the conversion rates he sees for transaction-based brands, like Blockbuster and Netflix. If a gamer clicks on Netflix to get more virtual money or points, he converts 10 percent of the time.

**5. Create a Brand-Hosted Social Networking Site.** Brands are doing their own take on this one, with Skittles.com, for example, dropping Web surfers straight into what appears to be Facebook, YouTube or Twitter. Others are creating social networking sites within their brand sites, such as footwear company Merrell, which reports seeing traffic spikes. Still other brands are exploring something in between.

Israel notes how client NGK, a Wixom, Mich.-based spark plug manufacturer, hosts an auto enthusiast social network, ArtofFast.com. The site allows its more than 300 members to talk about vehicles and speed in between reading NGK blogs, participating in surveys and noting "NGK Events," such as upcoming races.